

*The*  
**TRANSPORTATION  
TRANSFORMATION**  
*Project*

FINAL REPORT



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PREPARED BY MZ STRATEGIES, LLC





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## Background

In late 2013 a group of national funders and advocates came together to discuss how transportation was being transformed from a focus on a single mode of travel to a broader discussion of how transportation investments shape communities, impact the environment and public health, provide access to opportunity for low-income communities, and influence regional economic competitiveness and workforce development. Federal policy change has been slow to recognize this broader context and keep pace with needed investments seeding further transformation in how people view the federal policy and funding role. Funders and advocates are responding with new questions about where and how they can have the most impact to maximize public benefits, especially to address the long-term, complex challenges associated with regional social and economic disparities, resiliency, and climate change.

In response, the Ford, Rockefeller and Surdna Foundations, together with TransitCenter, funded a 2014 national study and outreach effort conducted by MZ Strategies, LLC in partnership with The Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities (TFN). This study, dubbed the "*Transportation Transformation Project*" addresses four key questions to inform **Funders** in prioritizing their grant making, to guide **National Advocates** in their work to support local innovations, and to support **Local and Regional Stakeholders** in advancing market and transportation transformations:

1. What are the key elements of policy, civic and market innovation that communities and the market are seeking?
2. What is the optimal level and type of coordination needed between local/regional and national advocates to influence local reforms while catalyzing state and federal policy change and market transformation?
3. What are the greatest capacity building needs, specifically for advancing market innovations that provide equitable outcomes?
4. What role should philanthropy play in public and private sector transportation transformation?

Findings are organized in response to these questions and summarize the key insights and findings drawn from interviews, focus groups, surveys, case studies and research conducted throughout 2014. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of project outreach which focused on community and national advocacy organizations, philanthropic institutions, and transportation technology entrepreneurs. Emerging research on transit and MPO governance, public attitudes, demographics and changing markets were invaluable to informing this study. A number of collateral materials was developed throughout the project, including a detailed

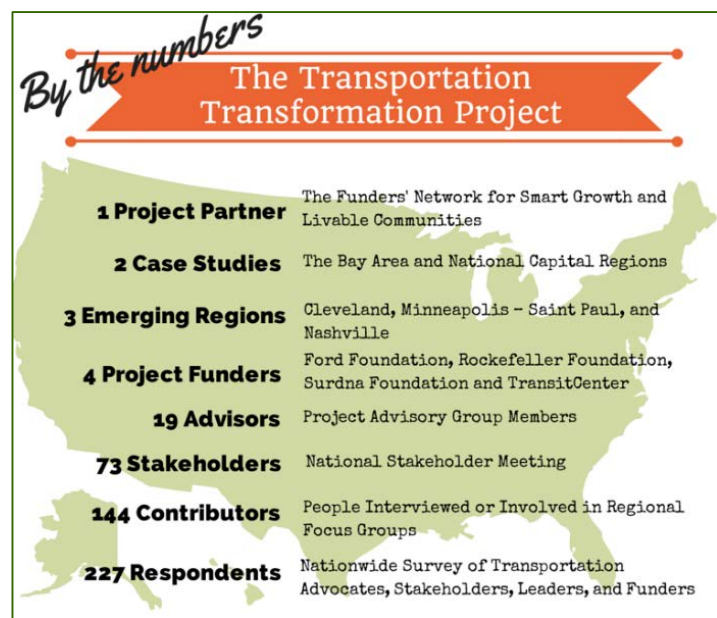


Figure 1. Transportation Transformation Project Outreach





different type of urbanism and increased mobility options. Against this backdrop though is a decline in public spending on infrastructure and growing partisanship particularly at state and federal levels both of which threaten these hard-won reforms. Previously, transportation was not seen as a partisan issue but this has changed in recent years with debates over how to fund transportation, its linkage to urban policy and climate change issues, and the larger socio-political debate over government’s role in land use and infrastructure.

Technology promises to profoundly change how people travel, how we fund transportation, and how cities grow in ways not yet fully understood. These trends are influencing the type of reforms advocates are pushing and the pathways they use to influence policies, investments and planning. At the same time, there is growing resistance to reform by some who feel threatened, overwhelmed by the rate of change, or have self interest in the status quo.

Recognizing that every community has different political, cultural and financial goals and constraints, this project didn’t seek to create a one-size-fits all model for reform, but rather to classify the essential ingredients for successful and wide-scale transportation policy and market transformation. “Transportation reform” is defined broadly to include local policy and investment actions which better respond to changing markets, technological innovation and emerging social and environmental needs. This encompasses a variety of efforts from increased funding for bicycling and transit to new mobility options to land use changes and greater adoption of performance-based and integrated planning.

### 1. Elements of Policy, Civic and Market Innovation and Related Challenges

The transportation field is being transformed by new technologies, increased private sector involvement, and shifting dynamics between federal, state and local public agencies all of which is creating a much greater emphasis on system efficiency, return on investment, and convenient and affordable access to transportation choices. Within this context, it is no surprise that the number and range of advocates working on transportation issues has expanded.

**Top Issues Advocates Are Working to Reform.** Throughout the project, stakeholders were asked to describe their work and theory of change. A desire to empower communities and citizens to make smarter choices, or to demonstrate and catalyze change were frequently cited goals. Some noted very

issue-specific goals for their work, i.e. a commuter transportation group working to provide mobility options, but a majority of those surveyed use sustainability, quality of life and healthy places as frameworks for their work. The key challenges stakeholders identified in moving forward are those shared by many regions around the country: money – how to get more, how it’s spent and who benefits; equitable development; and local implementation.

In May 2014, MZ Strategies conducted a national survey of transportation leaders and advocates to map the advocacy



Figure 3. Top Three Reform Issues Reported in Transportation Transformation Spring 2014 Survey (Source: MZ Strategies, LLC)

ecosystem. As shown in Figure 3, transit is the top overall reform issue for groups working at every level of government to increase funding or improve service. Other top issues are bicycle and pedestrian, transit-oriented development, community engagement and land use reforms.<sup>2</sup>

Of the 227 survey respondents:

- 157 reported working on national-level reforms
- 171 reported working on state-level reforms in all 50 states
- 174 reported working on region-level reforms in 340 regions, and
- 152 working on local-reforms in over 250 cities.

Advocacy groups did not report being deeply engaged with freight, workforce development or technology and open data issues. This latter gap is surprising given that technology and information are transforming community engagement, how people travel and how they access information.

**Technology Innovation as Transformation.** Technology-driven transportation innovation is growing exponentially, especially in large metro areas.<sup>3</sup> Public sector agencies are challenged to respond and adapt, especially given the generally slow rate by which bureaucratic agencies operate.

Access to technology is becoming a transportation pre-requisite whether to get information, park or rent a car, buy a transit pass, or to participate in public outreach efforts. Those who cannot afford or access these emerging new technologies are at a decided disadvantage. Technological solutions are increasingly based on sensors and feedback from smart phones, yet low income residents and the elderly have significantly lower smart phone ownership rates than the rest of the population.<sup>4</sup> Ensuring fair and open access to new technologies and information systems has become a transportation imperative, yet is not usually on the radar of funders or advocates.<sup>5</sup> More research is needed to look at the potential equity impacts of emerging technologies. This includes uncovering the ability of low-income and non-English speaking consumers to affordably access and use these tools whether for mobility, information or public engagement purposes.

A number of private sector and non-profit leaders who are working to advance new transportation technologies were consulted for this project.<sup>6</sup> Several have played a key role in civic technology innovation.

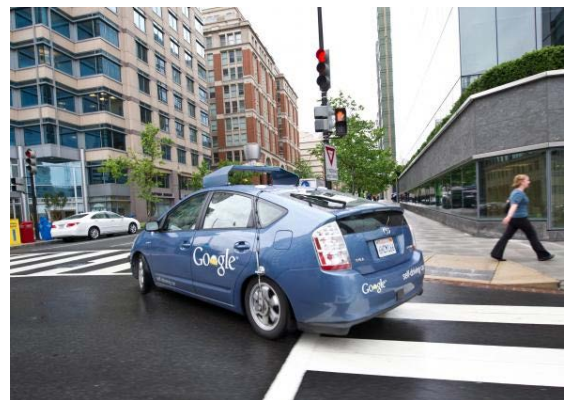


Figure 4. Google's self-driving car goes for a test ride in Washington DC (Source: Slate)

<sup>2</sup> A more complete survey analysis memo is available to download at [www.mzstrategies.com](http://www.mzstrategies.com)

<sup>3</sup> Janice King, "How Transportation Technologies will change everything," *Government Technology: Solutions for State and Local Government* (November 4, 2014) <http://www.govtech.com/transportation/How-Transportation-Technologies-Will-Change-Everything-.html>

<sup>4</sup> Smith, Aaron. "Smartphone Ownership 2013" Pew Research Internet Project. 5 June 2013. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/06/05/smartphone-ownership-2013/>

<sup>5</sup> Results of survey administered at the September 24, 2014 Transportation Transformation National Stakeholder meeting.

<sup>6</sup> A summary of findings specific to transportation technology is available to download at [www.mzstrategies.com](http://www.mzstrategies.com)

For instance, the Center for Neighborhood Technology was among the early innovators of car sharing and operated one of the first programs in Chicago. Non-profits testing this model paved the way for private companies like Enterprise, ZipCar and Car 2 Go to enter and quickly dominate this space. Groups such as Greenbelt Alliance and TransForm in the Bay Area have pushed the public sector to adapt real-time data and improve performance measures. Open data is key to improving government transparency. Foundations have supported efforts by advocates and public agencies including performance measure dashboards, scenario planning and other data-reliant decision making tools.

Yet, advocates surveyed for this project do not report technology as a major reform issue they are working to address, often because they lack the staff or technical capacity to do so. Reform advocates appear to be lagging behind private and public sector adoption of these technologies hampering their ability to influence the adoption and policy issues related to transportation-related technology.

**Funding Shortfalls Create Opportunity and Challenge.** Transportation funding itself remains a significant challenge and area of innovation. Federal funding is a smaller, yet vital percentage of funding. Funding is diversifying with state and local governments stepping up to find new ways to pay for system preservation and expansion. The private sector is being courted and interest in public-private partnerships create new opportunities and challenges including less transparency. Advocates have focused on local ballot funding measures, but there is increased action at the state level where statewide advocacy organizations are often lacking or less able to influence policy. Engagement at the federal level remains critical with threats to funding of key programs and policies that advocates and funders support.

Transportation funding mechanisms are being transformed as public revenues have failed to keep pace with need (especially at the federal level), and private sector interest in infrastructure investment is growing. Organizations such as the Eno Foundation and the Brookings Institution, together with the transportation industry and government, are seeking to solve the funding and finance puzzle.<sup>7</sup> Funding debates are now occurring at almost every level, creating new demands and opportunities for advocacy and reform. This is particularly acute at the state level where advocacy efforts are weaker.

Oregon, Pennsylvania and Virginia are among the states experimenting with new funding sources beyond the gas tax while others such as Wisconsin and Texas seek to protect highway funds from being spent on other purposes. California, through significant advocacy efforts by groups such as NRDC, Greenbelt Alliance and others, passed legislation (SB-375) specifically tying transportation to climate and housing policy while bringing new revenues to the table. The past decade saw a rise in local transportation funding ballot measures. The November 2014 election was no different, with roughly two-thirds of transportation-related measures approved.<sup>8</sup> Sales tax and property tax measures are the most prevalent, and have engendered significant opportunity for regional discussions around transportation's value, its connection to broader social issues including connecting workers to jobs, quality of life, and the ability of businesses to attract talent. These campaigns provide critical opportunities for advocates to create and test cross-sector coalitions and sharpen their message. Some

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<sup>7</sup> Eno Foundation (2014). "Partnership Financing: Improving Transportation Infrastructure Through Public Private Partnerships;" and Eduardo Engel, Ronald Fischer and Alexander Galetovic (February 2011). "Public Private Partnerships to Revamp US Infrastructure" published by the Brookings Institution.

<sup>8</sup> Transit ballot measures tracked by the Center for Transportation Excellence: [www.cfte.org](http://www.cfte.org) (November 2014)



of the painful losses provide lessons regarding tensions between environmental, equity, and transportation groups and the power of well-funded opposition.

**Going Beyond Transportation.** Regardless of the scale at which funding issues are being debated and shaped, reformers must sharpen their advocacy skills. Groups such as the Center for Transportation Excellence and Smart Growth America are helping local coalitions from one another about how to successfully win ballot measures and funding campaigns, but we still have a long way to go – particularly in light of growing private sector interest and a larger anti-tax public sentiment.

Transportation is increasingly recognized by elected and business leaders for its role in achieving broader community goals. Researchers at the Urban Land Institute and the National Association of Realtors have tracked the market changes occurring over the past decade as home owners, renters, and commercial tenants are increasingly wanting to live in walkable and mixed-use communities. Public health advocates and funders such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation have transformed discussions regarding the transportation connection with rising obesity, asthma and heart disease rates. In many communities, the Chambers of Commerce are powerful allies in the fight for increased transportation funding and building out transit systems to better serve metropolitan workers and businesses.

These new voices, many of whom engender more public trust than elected officials or planners, are important to broader transportation reforms. In Cleveland, University Circle Inc. brings together the region's key anchor medical and university institutions. They helped to directly fund transit, bicycle and community redevelopment projects, and applied pressure on government to do more with its funding, planning and policy tools. Federal Environmental justice guidance and civil rights laws also provide important leverage points for equity advocates to fight for better transit service, mitigation efforts to reduce harmful emissions or environmental degradation caused by transportation projects, or whom have not been adequately involved through public outreach.<sup>9</sup>

An expanded framework creates new partnership opportunities that can support greater reforms. Yet broadening the frame is problematic to convey distinct transportation needs within a more complex policy context. This is particularly true at the Congressional level, where Republicans who now control the relevant House and Senate committees take a very narrow view of transportation, questioning funding for bikes and transit much less for housing or other non-transportation areas.

While advocates are building new alliances with non-traditional transportation partners this is still an area where groups are challenged to find successful strategies for long-term engagement and capacity building needed to engender partnerships necessary for influencing broader transportation reforms. Bringing local reform victories to scale so that national policy and markets are influenced remains a challenge. Many advocates are pinning their best chances on influencing market pressure. Large companies such as Google, Uber and Daimler are investing in new technologies and car sharing, shifting demographics are driving demand for transportation options and more walkable communities, and these same options yield tangible public health benefits and cost savings. Yet increased market attention also creates additional complexity, more opaque decision making, and growing demands for advocates and funders to address the multiple leverage points.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://sf.streetsblog.org/2010/02/12/fta-wont-fund-bart-airport-connector-70-million-to-go-to-transit-ops/>

## 2. Coordinating Advocacy Efforts Within and Across Regions

**Use and Maintain Cross-Sector Coalitions.** Among the questions this project sought to answer was the level and type of coordination needed between local and national advocates to influence local and regional transformation, while also catalyzing larger state and federal policy change and market transformation. Cross-sector coalitions have emerged as a highly effective means of coordination both for groups within a region and also to engage national advocates either directly as coalition partners, or to help coordinate, provide technical assistance and strategic direction to these types of collaboratives. The Great Communities Collaborative in the Bay Area, the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative, and Mile High Connects in Denver all illustrate this type of approach.

More recently, cross-sector coalitions are forming in emerging innovation regions from Florida to Tennessee to Ohio and beyond. The Greater Cleveland Regional Trails Leadership Network is an informal collaborative bringing together public sector, non-profit and philanthropic partners to elevate active transportation issues. In Nashville, Cumberland Region Tomorrow is a well-established collaborative regional partnership working to address growth and development issues. They are building new strategic connections with regional civil rights and environmental justice organizations to further strengthen and diversify their advocacy power and more intentionally infuse equity into regional growth and development discussions. Regions that have the greatest success in advancing comprehensive reforms are those that **blend technical capacity with community organizing** allowing them to pivot quickly and respond to unforeseen challenges or opportunities when they arise.

### Undertake an Advocacy Assessment.

There is no one-size fits all answer to how best to coordinate between local and national advocacy groups. However, an **advocacy assessment** provides a powerful framework to prioritize and leverage resources whether a region is in the early stages of transportation reform or well into its transformation. It can identify areas of strength local advocates possess, prioritize areas of need, and identify gaps where national advocacy partners can add most value. The text box above provides sample questions to examine as part of such an assessment. A first step is to identify and map the decision making process for how transportation investments are made within a region or community. Referred to as “following the money” this is an on-going process to identify intervention points and factors that influence decision making.

Be realistic about existing organizational capacity, political cultures and where change needs to occur. Map the ability of existing advocacy groups to influence these factors either through technical and policy

#### Advocacy Assessment: Factors to Consider

- ✓ Which agencies and institutions influence transportation investment and policy decisions?
- ✓ How are decisions made and where can the public engage?
- ✓ Who are the key power brokers and decision makers?
- ✓ What is the regional economic and political culture?
- ✓ How well do existing policies and funding patterns serve employers, households, public safety and the environment?
- ✓ What data or messaging is most effective to influence change?
- ✓ How well aligned are existing advocacy groups to influence these factors and decision makers?
- ✓ Where are the gaps and what voices, data or messengers are missing?
- ✓ What are the priorities to fill either because of timing or where influence may be greatest?
- ✓ Are there national or state groups that may be able to assist in either directly filling these needs or in building needed local capacity?

advocacy or grassroots and political advocacy. For instance, the Bay Area and Twin Cities reform experience is much more regionally focused, while the reforms in Cleveland and Washington DC are more local. These distinctions reflect the presence or absence of regional agencies and jurisdictional level where funding and policy tend to occur. The first two places have relatively robust regional governments who allocate millions of dollars annually for infrastructure, while in the latter two places local governments (& the state) play the dominate role in directing transportation policies and spending. Despite a concerted push by national funders and the Obama administration over the past five years, regionalism is still a relatively new and untested concept susceptible to the realities of where local power and decision making lie.

One common gap that exists among regional coalitions is under-representation of non-traditional transportation groups. Foundations can be effective in helping to bridge this gap. In Tennessee, the Surdna Foundation funded the Sustainable Community Development Group to work with Cumberland Region Tomorrow on an equity assessment to help strengthen regional collaboration and leadership development among organizations working to advance equity issues.<sup>10</sup> The analysis uncovered a rich tapestry of organizations and a deep history by civil rights groups on transportation and public health issues that creates a foundation for deeper future engagement by these organizations on regional growth and transportation.

**View Advocacy as a Partnership.** Coordination between local and national groups are the most effective when outside groups spend the time to create strong partnerships that leverage the existing knowledge and relationships that local groups bring, and in turn use the experience working in local communities to demonstrate the power of new ideas, flag external barriers that exist (i.e. outdated federal or state policies), and create larger market demand. Local groups expressed frustration with those national groups who call upon them only when they need a local example to make a point with Congress, or when they “parachute in” to a region and push a national agenda that may not be in sync with what local advocates are trying to reform. National groups recognize this and are working to create more collaborative models that leverage local partner organizations. One recent example of this is the Equity Asset Map released in 2014 by the Safe Routes to Schools Partnership in collaboration with the NAACP, which shows the diversity of national and local partners working across the country that can be leveraged for state, local and federal reforms.<sup>11</sup>

**Deploy an Inside/Outside Advocacy Strategy.** A highly effective strategy for advancing deep and lasting reform is when advocates coordinate to push for reforms both from within and from outside of targeted organizations. Targeted technical assistance and relationship building geared towards planners, engineers and decision makers at metropolitan planning organizations, state DOTs and local public works agencies can be instrumental in gaining acceptance and understanding of how to implement priority reforms. Advocates can make it easier for public agency staff to embrace reform by producing research on best practices, sample ordinances, and technical analysis. Spending time to educate, connect and motivate practitioners and decision makers by those they view to be their peers yields the

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<sup>10</sup> Sustainable Community Development Group, *Promoting Equity In Middle Tennessee: Diversifying Partnerships In Transit and Transportation* (August 2014).

<sup>11</sup> The Equity Map was a project of the National Active Transportation Diversity Task Force and is available at <http://saferoutespartnership.org/blog/national-active-transportation-diversity-task-force-releases-equity-asset-map>

greatest results. This requires creating and leveraging partners who are viewed as legitimate representatives of the groups you are trying to target. One stellar example of this is the Smart State Transportation Initiative, created by Rockefeller Foundation as part of its national multi-year transportation initiative, which provides technical assistance by transportation practitioners to state transportation agency personnel. Another is the Institute for Sustainable Communities' leadership academies.

Yet pushing for change within a public agency yields limited results if there is not a complementary push coming from outside the agency. Bureaucracies resist reforms that happen too quickly or that are seen as too dramatic without the vocal support of key constituencies. Successful advocacy needs to involve *both push and cover* so that elected officials and public agencies feel compelled to reform, but also buffered by outside interests when they make decisions that may ruffle feathers. Without this cover, agencies may resist further future reforms. To cite two examples, significant policy reforms were recently advanced by metropolitan planning organizations in the Bay Area and in the Twin Cities to link housing, equity and transportation. In both regions, advocates pushed the MPOs to make stronger linkages between allocating transportation funds and reducing regional economic disparities. Opposition from Tea Party members, suburban communities, and conservative constituencies has since arisen putting these agencies under fire and in need of support from progressive groups.

**Invest in Political Advocacy.** Successful political advocacy requires a strategic assessment of who has the political power to drive change or hold it up, what political levers exist or are needed, and at what point political pressure should be applied. Successful advocates in politically-conservative regions often



*Figure 5. The Coalition for Smarter Growth in the Greater Washington DC Region holds walking tours for local elected officials, citizens and developers to see first-hand the issues associated with walkable and inclusive transit-served communities. (Source: M. Zimmerman, 2014)*

use a tailored approach to cultivate and support individual political leaders. This strategy requires a blend of grassroots organizing in opposition to bad projects and policies as well as organizing in favor when warranted. Demonstrating the ability to stand up for good development and to provide political support for progressive leaders is critical to building relationships and demonstrating political relevance.

Business leadership strengthens political leverage but takes time to nurture. The business voice is often resistant to weigh in directly on advocacy issues not immediately tied to their bottom line such as tax policy. Business leaders may be more comfortable investing in advocacy organizations whose work they support. Groups such as the Coalition for Smarter Growth in Washington DC

rely on corporate sponsors to help fund their work and spend substantial time to cultivate these relationships and host special events targeted to business champions to educate private sector leaders. Given changing demographics and transportation inequities, it is important going forward to also be intentional about building leadership among communities of color to continue to shape and influence future transportation reforms. One nationally-recognized example of this kind of work is Urban Habitat's Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute in the Bay Area.

### 3. Pressing Capacity Building Needs

Transportation is a highly technical field. Advocates must find a way to navigate the acronyms, regulations, modeling and planning processes to ensure a place at the decision making table. With greater private sector involvement, particularly in transportation and development financing, capacity needs are also growing to understand innovative financing, address pre-development needs, and other finance and market-related technical skills that advocates and even public sector leaders may not possess. The need for capacity building is occurring within markets that are rapidly shifting in some regions, while technology and social media further accelerate access to information. In many ways, national and local advocates are learning together and testing new models of community organizing, project financing, political advocacy and communications.

Figure 6 summarizes key capacity needs identified by stakeholders during this project. National and regional peer learning networks, capacity building targeted to political leaders and decision makers, leadership development and investments in building local capacity are among the ways that these needs can be met. The field has moved beyond identifying the need for reform, to focus on delivering reforms by influencing markets, agency cultures, politics, and the media.

**What are the most pressing capacity needs to successfully collaborate on transportation reform at the local level?**

- ✓ Build and maintain success coalitions
- ✓ Talk about transportation's shared values
- ✓ Better understanding and using data Inside/Outside game success stories
- ✓ Private market strategies
- ✓ Analyzing political capacity

Figure 6. Top Capacity Building Needs Identified in September 24 National Stakeholder Meeting

**Capacity building must be self-sustaining.** Past philanthropic investments have built substantial capacity at the national and local levels. Foundations must leverage this capacity to develop the next wave of funding and policy reform models. National advocacy organizations provide important support to local organizations, but the focus needs to be on how local groups build their own capacity to self-sustain and embed successful models. A fundamental requirement of capacity building is having clear local-ownership and partnership between capacity builders and the community. Some types of “quick hit” capacity building can be effective to jump-start reforms within a community, or target a particular need such as doing a walkability survey or planning charrette. However, establishing multi-year peer learning networks or capacity building partnerships allows groups to build deeper technical expertise and relationships that can be critical for long-term impact. One stellar model that combines these aspects is Advocacy Advance, a project of the League of American Bicyclists and the Alliance for Biking and Walking. With support from the SRAM Corporation, the advocacy team has been supporting work in dozens of regions since 2009 to both understand how to navigate the changing federal transportation program and influence decision making by state DOTs and MPOs. This is done through providing external technical assistance and providing small grants to local advocates to grow their internal capacity and influence.

**Financing equitable reform a growing capacity challenge across all sectors.** Transportation relies on public investment, with the federal government being a key funder. Advocates in emerging innovation regions are building capacity to follow analyze, influence and navigate these traditional funding sources. Yet a growing need exists for adaptive capacity around innovative financing, private sector financing options, and capital markets and public finance. Groups working on equitable TOD have been slogging



through these trenches for several years, but similar needs exist for understanding how to leverage and create funding to support transportation options, address equity issues arising from pricing or lack of technology access, and how to better link investments to achieving community benefits.

Political capacity is closely tied to financial capacity building. Efforts to pass local or state finance packages, influence public-private sector agreements, and include policy reforms as part of funding packages have become more commonplace. Cross-sector coalitions work at the center of this nexus, and different coalition members have different capacity building needs and assets that can be nurtured.

Once again, national organizations can play a critical role to build both financial and political capacity but both must be tailored to local contexts. Given the variation that exists across regions regarding market dynamics, political cultures, enabling legislation and zoning peer learning can be a powerful means for building capacity across regions. Sub-granting between local and national organizations is one means for fostering this type of place-based and adaptive capacity building.

**Capacity lacking for state-level advocacy work.** The 2014 election resulted in a major power shift with a majority of governorships and state legislatures now controlled by Republicans. Transportation policy and funding have devolved even more to the state level. Evidence suggests that reform advocates are not well positioned to influence state level change within this new political context. Targeted capacity building to state officials and practitioners is needed in addition to greater support for strategies to influence state policies. This need will continue to rise in coming years, and state-level success can either significantly hamper or accelerate federal policy reform and market response.

**Community organizing capacity needs remain.** Great facts and reports only get you so far if there is no one to use them, read them, or take action. Grassroots engagement is labor intensive and groups working at this level are often operating on shoe string budgets and on multiple issues. Linking technical expertise with grassroots organizing enables sustained, flexible and multi-prong approaches that integrate transportation with broader community-driven goals.



*Figure 7. The Bay Area's Six Wins Network relied heavily upon community organizing partners to influence policy makers and planners. (Source: Public Advocates, Inc.)*

The Bay Area experience is instructive in showing how community organizing and technical policy analysis can leverage one another to achieve impressive results. Within the region, reform efforts were advanced by a group of policy partners with deep subject matter knowledge and analytic skills. Their efforts yielded some important early results. However, they soon recognized the need for base-building partners who could bring an extensive network of local very low-income voices and strong campaign experience to influence policy makers to undertake more substantial reforms changing transportation spending. Sometimes these groups worked together formally while at other times they pursued different, parallel paths, all the while reinforcing a broader reform agenda. Regional advocates worked with and reinforced efforts by their statewide partners (many of whom were state-level groups of national organizations such as NRDC and the Sierra Club) to pass statewide legislation that created the requirement and/or funding for regional reforms.

For those regions beginning to emerge as reform innovators, creating capacity for successful community organizing is essential. Without it, those groups trying to push for policy reforms are severely limited in

their ability to create or sustain broader change. Funding is needed for these activities, but internal organizational support is also needed for many of these groups on how to successfully fundraise, communications and social media support, and ways to partner and leverage with other groups to meet staff or resource needs across organizations.

**Bridge the technology gap among advocates.** Groups such as Envision Utah are developing new ways to merge data, community visioning tools and public outreach to fundamentally change community engagement and planning. In other instances, local groups do not have the funding or capacity to use or influence tech issues or deploy new technologies in their own organizing and advocacy work. There is a critical need for information-sharing on best practices especially regarding data standards, strategies to derive public benefit from private sector technology adoption by cities, and opportunities to ensure access for underserved communities to new shared-use mobility and data tools.

**Communications remains a key capacity need.** Groups still struggle with how best to convey the complexity of transportation in simple, and relevant terms. Expanding the narrative beyond transportation has become an essential ingredient for locally-driven reform efforts to build broader political and community support. In Minnesota, the business-led Itasca Group funded research to quantify the return on investment from the proposed regional rail network crafting a funding message that spoke to employers and investors. The Six Wins Network in California early on developed a video using community of color voices, pictures and people to tell their own story about transportation's impact empowering previously under-represented voices to engage in powerful new ways. In Virginia, conservative bloggers writing about the benefits of smart growth have facilitated bi-partisan bridges necessary to influence local and state politicians.

Communication strategies need to be authentic, easy to grasp and motivate action. This is essential to successful community organizing and policy advocacy, yet few groups are familiar with what successful models have been used by their peers. Capacity building is needed to help groups design communication strategies, develop effective messaging and identify new messengers to engage. It is an area where the field is rapidly evolving both at the national level with compelling research by groups such as Transportation for America and USPIRG on the public's changing travel preferences (among other topics), which garner major media attention, and closer to home where stories are further refined by local bloggers such as Streetsblog, Mobility Lab and others.

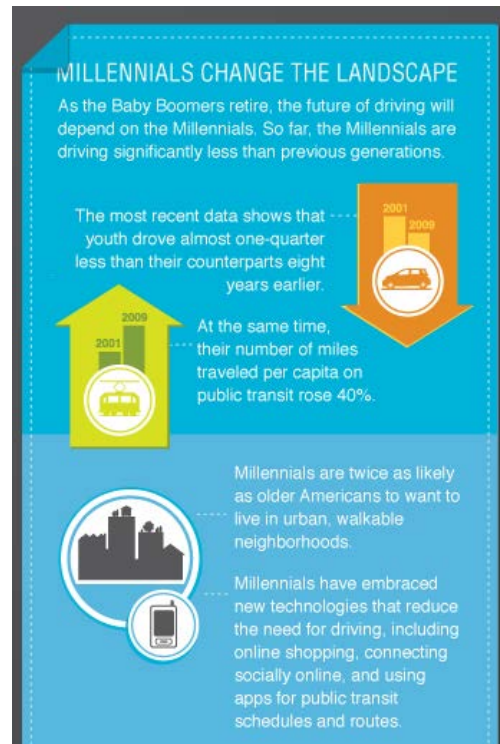


Figure 8. Info graphics help to make complex data easier to understand (Source: USPIRG)

#### 4. Recommendations for Philanthropy

The opportunities for transportation to better serve communities, the environment, the economy and people is substantial. We are in a moment of profound possibility and change. Influencing this positively will require continued funder support by a broader group of foundations. The following four overarching recommendations respond to key needs identified by this study. Some are more applicable to national funders while others rely upon community or local foundations to support.

##### RECOMMENDATION #1. Promote Systems Change

- Don't Sit on the Sidelines
- Develop Technical and Organizing Capacity
- Sustain Your Commitment

Philanthropy is uniquely situated to bridge efforts and build shared understanding between advocates, public sector and market leaders, anchor institutions, universities and the media. Local and national foundations can be catalysts and stewards pushing for systems change to influence markets, institutions and public opinion. Philanthropic influence on institutions and markets is realized through fully leveraging its grant making, convening power and strategic access to decision makers.

**Don't Sit on the Sidelines** - Based upon the regions studied for this project, it appears that national foundations such as Ford, Rockefeller and Surdna are best positioned to drive systems change both among their local philanthropy partners and across the regions which they fund. However, local foundations are most attuned to driving deeper systems change within their own regions and states given their familiarity with the political, cultural and economic landscape. Local and community foundations should leverage their own power to push systems change. Where foundations have used all of their available tools – grant making, access to power brokers and decision makers, convening grantees and regional leaders, and directly engaged in regional collaboratives – the results have been profound.

In Cleveland, the decision by the Gund Foundation to create and fund a new organization, Bike Cleveland and bring together several distinct advocacy partners has been transformative. It resulted from a year-long local strategic planning effort led by the national Alliance for Biking and Walking. Since its creation three years ago, Bike Cleveland has been the leading force behind several important reforms including: City adoption of a 3-foot passing law, a Complete Streets resolution, a completed bike share feasibility study, and increased investment in bike lanes. Throughout the process, Gund has been an active partner, funder, and driver for systems change.

**Balance Investments in Growing Technical and Organizing Capacity** - Transportation reform appears to have the greatest impact when funders and advocates coordinate policy advocacy with community organizing. This involves investments in research, capacity building and data development along with grassroots organizing and communications. Funders need to assess where the needs are greatest in each region. For emerging innovation areas, targeted investments to create baseline reports, comparative studies or regional visioning documents are among the kinds of “catalytic” strategies that can jumpstart policy reforms. However, in these regions there may be an even greater need to also invest in developing the community organizing structure and coalition building necessary to press for reforms. In more established innovation regions, there may be a need to fill strategic technical or

advocacy gaps. Funders should push grantees to undertake an advocacy assessment and prioritize actions.

**Support with More than Money** – Foundations have limited resources and many have requirements on the number of grants or years an individual grantee can be supported. Yet a frequent plea to philanthropy is that it find ways to provide more sustained funding support. Among the ways that philanthropy can leverage its existing resources and sustain transportation reform efforts:

- Coordinate with other funding partners to help facilitate and leverage opportunities;
- Commit to at least a two-year grant to allow organizations to build capacity;
- Assist grantees in building internal capacity including on performance measurement and evaluation, project management and fund raising;
- Convene grantees regularly to facilitate shared learning, and help match new grantees with longer-term grantees to facilitate new partnerships and cross learning;
- Require or provide strategic planning support for those grantees at the end of cycle; and,
- Analyze grant portfolios to assess the mix of policy advocacy, capacity building and community organizing to ensure they contribute collectively to advancing systems change.

#### RECOMMENDATION #2. Fill Strategic Gaps

- Empower Equity Voices
- Catalyze Technological Innovation
- Provide Mission Driven Capital

As government budgets are reduced, capacity building and research are often the first cuts. In many regions, philanthropy has helped to fill the gap. Advocates repeatedly expressed the importance of this support both to their individual organizations, and to enabling the larger field address the major transformations occurring. Developing data, best practices and the ability to organize at the grassroots level are critical to shaping change. Beyond filling these “essential gaps” is a set of strategic gaps where philanthropy can intervene to push the field to go further than it would otherwise.

**Empower Equity Voices** - Many regions and individual advocacy organizations struggle with how to embed social equity issues into transformational reform work. Over the past eight years as national and regional economies faltered, transportation reform arguments increasingly were couched in economic terms that left out or downplayed equity. This suggests that groups may not have the confidence to talk about equity or see its fundamental connection to the economy. Philanthropy should prioritize capacity building to allow equity groups to develop their own technical and staff capacity, and push transportation reform groups to diversify their message and reach out to build local leadership from within communities of color. Philanthropy is uniquely positioned to create these linkages and leverage the constituencies, perspectives, and political power that these different equity groups bring.

**Catalyze Technological Innovation** - Technology is an area where the market is moving quickly, the public sector at a slower pace, and most reform advocates further behind. Philanthropy must help to change this. TransitCenter is one of the few funders currently in this space to have funded research and conferences on new mobility options and supported the recent launch of the Shared Use Mobility Center. Transportation technology investments by corporate giants such as Google and Daimler dwarfs what philanthropy can provide. But this also signals a need for greater involvement by all reform

players, as change is already here with more coming sooner than we may think! Among the technology-related issues where funder engagement can be especially transformative:

- Increase the ability of advocates to understand, influence and share best practices regarding new technologies,
- Address equity impacts that may be overlooked by the market and private entrepreneurs; and
- Protect and establish standards, fair and open access to data, and government transparency.

**Provide Mission Driven Capital** – In regions like Denver, Salt Lake City, Seattle, and Atlanta, public sector and non-profit leaders have succeeded in advancing a number of policy reforms. While more needs to be done, it’s a question of sustaining and evolving advocacy work, not a technical capacity gap. Groups in emerging and high innovation regions are trying to adapt their capacity to take on new challenges, particularly around how to finance innovative, cost-effective infrastructure solutions. Numerous regions are simultaneously trying to create land acquisition funds, infrastructure funds, funding to support station area planning and last mile connections, construction-related neighborhood and business remediation funds, and apprenticeship and workforce development funds. These kinds of innovative reforms require capital investments that the private market and public agencies do not typically have. Philanthropy can significantly drive innovation through its investment of mission-driven capital, including direct grants and program related investments.

### RECOMMENDATION #3. Leverage Existing Capacity

- Build Upon Local Assets to Transform Transportation Policies
- Coordinate Adaptive Capacity Building Between Local and National Advocates

Advocates who successfully navigate transportation’s complex planning and investment decision processes can substantially influence policy reform. Technical assistance is needed to “unpack” these processes and tailor legislation, zoning codes, financing models, or other strategies to effectively address local context. Many national advocacy organizations are funded to provide this support and the field has advanced considerably as a result. However, this project has also uncovered a tremendous amount of local expertise that has been created particularly in those communities benefiting from sustained and deep philanthropic support.

**Build Upon Local Assets to Transform Transportation Policies** – Through past investments, philanthropy has supported transportation reform work in many communities be it through funding groups specifically to work on transportation, or funding groups that are working on related issues such as public health, affordable housing, community development or climate change. Philanthropy must leverage its investments to strengthen these cross-sector linkages which are critical to transportation transformation and policy reform. This can be to create new advocacy organizations to tackle specific issues such as Active Transportation and Bicycling as done in Cleveland through the Gund Foundation, or to bring transportation reform to suburban jurisdictions as was done in Maryland when the Rockefeller Foundation funded BRT advocacy by groups such as the Sierra Club and Coalition for Smarter Growth.

**Coordinate Adaptive Capacity Building between Local and National Advocates** - National organizations such as the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and Low-Income Investment Fund (LIIF) are



among those being funded to provide infrastructure financing technical assistance to local communities. While many communities are seen as lacking the capacity to put these type of complex deals together local advocates and public agencies are eager to acquire this internal capacity. Philanthropy must do more to create shared learning and leverage existing capacity. This can be done through funding place-based demonstrations that require national organizations to partner with local organizations or through requiring some degree of financing coordination between local and national groups. Local groups often lack the funding needed to staff their involvement so sub-granting can be a powerful means to engage and ensure their ownership in the project. Conversely, some communities may be able to provide some degree of match funding from local governments or local foundations. This type of local “skin” can help to ensure long-term adoption and ownership as well. Local affinity groups such as the national network of City Sustainability Directors are an effective way to identify and tap local capacity partners.

#### RECOMMENDATION #4. Invest in Field Building

- Promote Learning Networks
- Spread the Wealth

Philanthropy must continue to help build the field by creating a community of learning across regions. This includes greater support for leadership development and peer learning exchanges with advocates, public agency leaders and staff, private sector leaders, and philanthropy itself.

**Promote Learning Networks** - There is a tremendous thirst for greater assistance to build and connect members of the transportation reform field. National conferences designed to connect elected officials, practitioners and local advocates such as Rail Volution or PolicyLink’s Equity Summit are important. So too are smaller and more targeted field building and leadership development efforts. Philanthropy must prioritize investments to build the field, bring in new voices and leaders, and help groups learn successful strategies for collaboration, conflict mediation, messaging, and organizational culture change. National foundations are well suited to provide this kind of funding, but local foundations also are important to identifying and funding regional and state learning networks. While webinars and large conferences are useful, they tend to not provide the same quality of networking, information sharing and capacity building that more targeted learning networks can provide. So too, there is a need for philanthropy to create sustained learning networks that better utilize new technologies and social media to support peer learning across regions.

**Spread the Wealth** - For the field to advance, we need more successful models in more places. Too often high capacity regions are repeatedly selected to test new concepts given the existing capacity and appetite for reform. Yet funders must do more to develop successful reform models in multiple regions in order to create stronger market and political pressures. Simply put, it is insufficient for innovation to occur in a handful of progressive states. This will require greater engagement and coordination by community and national foundations. One method for leveraged capacity building is through sub-granting whereby grant makers require national organizations they fund to include local partners in their work and fund capacity building and engagement by these groups. This can be particularly powerful in regions without a strong local philanthropic community. Another needed step is to re-establish a Transportation Reform Group within the funding community, as previously supported through the

Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities. A focused effort is needed to capture the full range of innovations occurring, support local foundations who have an interest but may be struggling with how to best engage in reform work, and to identify areas of the country where there are gaps that national foundations may be able to fill.

## Conclusion

Deep and sustained philanthropic involvement produces impressive diversity and technical capacity of the local advocacy community which in turn leads to larger systems change. San Francisco, the Twin Cities, Boston, Seattle, and New York all fit into this category. Yet in some communities where philanthropy is deeply involved reform has been slower, i.e. Cleveland, Detroit, and Baltimore while other in communities with little philanthropic involvement, such as Washington DC, Nashville, and Portland, Oregon, major transportation-related reforms are happening.

What it does take is local leadership – which can come from non-profits, the public sector and increasingly the private sector – reinforced by political, policy and community acumen. In many instances this capacity is built over time by individual leaders, public sector investments and some level of philanthropic support. While philanthropy is not the silver bullet, it is an essential ingredient. The substantial investment by funders over the last six years in transportation has fueled an incredible amount of reform, coalition building, technical expertise, and brought vital new players to the conversation. The political, fiscal and social challenges have also grown during this time.

If national funders do not maintain a meaningful grant making presence in these issues, local funders will need to step in to sustain momentum that has been built and ensure that gains are not lost. Many advocates are trying to find new ways to fund their work, including relying more on individual donors, corporations and for-fee services – practices that may be easier for larger and more established groups to successfully undertake, but may influence the objectivity of some groups.

The need is great, but even more the opportunity for reform has never been larger as technology, markets, demographics and political shifts are changing the fundamentals of the field. As communities recognize the linkage between transportation investments and other important economic, environmental and social issues philanthropy can serve as a powerful and tangible tool for community organizing and reform.